PETER S. PERRY

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Revelation 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13 and Ancient Communication

Mohr Siebeck

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Preface

This monograph is a slightly revised version of my Ph.D. dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in October 2008. The project began at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Mesa, Arizona in 1999 when members of the congregation approached me with questions and concerns about the book of Revelation. I am grateful to the people of Our Savior's who attended the classes I taught and read the book of Revelation with me. They supported our decision to begin doctoral studies in 2004, and invited me back to perform the book of Revelation in January 2007.

I am deeply grateful to my advisor, Prof. Barbara Rossing, who read numerous drafts and gave substantive comments, and to my dissertation committee, Profs. Hans-Josef Klauck, Edgar Krentz, and David Rhoads. Profs. Craig Koester and Margaret Mitchell gave me incisive feedback at critical moments in formulating the dissertation proposal. After the dissertation colloquy, Prof. Klaus-Peter Adam helped me clarify the relationship of a rhetorical perspective with redaction history.

Writing a dissertation can be a socially, spiritually, and scholastically isolating experience. The dissertation writing group at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago helped me to overcome that isolation. Over the years, this group has included Bonnie Flessen, Jin Yang Kim, Stephen Kimondo, Stephen Knapp, May May Latt, Britt Leslie, Michael Macchia, Paul Moonu, Cheryl Pero, Josh Rice, Wiriya Tipvarakankoon, and Ji Woon Yoo. I am grateful that they discussed ideas, read drafts, made suggestions, and supported me as I researched and wrote.

My wife, Dana, and daughters, Ruth and Esther, have been my primary supporters and cheerleaders. This book would not have been written without their love and patience.

"Victory belongs to our God, the One Who is Sitting on the Throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:10).

Chicago, June 20, 2009 Peter S. Perry

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Experiencing Rev 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13

The thesis of this book is that first century audiences could identify Rev 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13 with other experiences of παρέκβασις (digression) heard in contemporary speeches and literature and described by Greco-Roman rhetoricians. Revelation 7:1–17 interrupts the series of seven seals before the seventh seal is opened and Rev 10:1–11:13 interrupts the series of seven trumpets before the seventh trumpet is blown. As with other examples of παρέκβασις, these passages become more important for understanding the rhetorical goals and strategy of the whole book because they require additional effort to understand the connection with what precedes and follows, they develop the ethos of the author and audience, and they excite the emotions of the audience. These passages characterize John and the people of God in worship and witness. They evoke confidence in God's protection and promises in the midst of the fear of the seals and trumpets, like islands of mercy in a sea of destruction. Analyzing Rev 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13 as digressions reveals how these passages are a critical part of the strategy to persuade an audience to witness even when it may result in death.

One approach to describe the experience of Rev 7 and 10–11 is to imagine an audience listening to Revelation read aloud. As the visions unfold, how do members of the audience relate each vision? What emotions do they feel?

The members of our imagined audience first hear the description of the glorified Jesus and his messages to seven assemblies in Asia Minor (Rev 1–3). They hear the description of the heavenly throne room, resplendent with glowing colors, fantastic living creatures, and white-robed elders (Rev 4). There is a scroll in God's hand that is sealed with seven seals. A Lamb takes the scroll and the cosmos erupt in praise. The living creatures, elders, angels, and creatures in heaven, earth, underworld, and sea are swept up in a wave of praise of God and the Lamb (Rev 5).

The audience hears how the Lamb breaks the seals one by one. Each seal seems to be a harbinger of suffering and death (Rev 6). After each of the first four seals is opened, a living creature calls out a rider who bears destruction to people on earth. After the Lamb breaks the fifth seal, the audience hears about the souls of people killed because they witnessed to

the word of God. The sixth seal brings the most terrifying vision: the sky rolling up, the sun darkening, the moon turning red like blood, the stars falling like fruit on fig trees, and a great earthquake. The kings of the earth, the magnates and generals, the rich and powerful, everyone – even slave and freed persons – they all cry out and hide from God and the Lamb. The sixth seal climaxes with the question, *"Who is able to stand?"* (Rev 6:17). If everyone is hiding, who indeed is able to stand?

The audience knows that there are seven seals on the scroll. After each of the first six seals, a brief event was described. By that pattern, the seventh seal should be opened following the climactic question, "Who is able to stand?" The audience waits for that question to be answered, for fear to be relieved or realized by the seventh seal.

Instead of the expected seventh seal, the audience hears a new vision begin with the words "After this…." Four angels restrain destructive winds while another angel seals God's slaves, who are identified with 144,000 from the tribes of Israel (7:1–8). A second vision shows a great multitude around God's throne, dressed in white, praising God and the Lamb (7:9–17). One of the elders explains the vision to John. Finally, the Lamb opens the seventh seal, which is followed by a half-hour of silence in heaven (8:1).

How do members of our imagined audience experience the visions that interrupt progress towards the seventh seal? How do they relate the visions to the seals? What impact does this have on their experience of the whole book?

After the seventh seal, seven angels with seven trumpets are introduced (Rev 8). As each blows their trumpet, disaster strikes the world. The first four trumpets bring destruction to the earth, sea, waters, and sky. Then, an eagle announces that three woes are coming. The demonic locusts following the fifth trumpet are identified as the first woe. After the sixth trumpet, demonic cavalry kills one-third of humanity by plagues. This catastrophe climaxes with John's summary that "*the rest of humankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent…*" (Rev 9:20).

The audience has to wait to experience the seventh trumpet. "Another mighty angel" makes an announcement and gives a scroll to John (Rev 10:1–11). Then, two witnesses are killed by the beast and left shamefully unburied on the street of a Great City before they are raised from the dead to ascend to heaven. A great earthquake punctuates their ascension, killing seven thousand people in the Great City while the rest give glory to God (11:1–13). These visions conclude with the announcement that the second woe has passed, which recalls the similar declaration following the fifth trumpet. Finally, the seventh trumpet is blown, announcing the Reign of the Lord.

How do members of the audience experience these visions before the seventh trumpet? How would they relate these visions to the trumpets? What connections would they make with the two visions in Rev 7? How would these experiences shape their interpretation of the book of Revelation?

These questions assume that 'audience' is the proper term for the recipients of the book of Revelation. The text can be read silently, of course, and in the age of iPods and multimedia, one can experience Revelation in a variety of ways. 'Audience' is not a generic term for recipients of the text but implies a particular reception scenario: a group of people in a specific time and place gathered to hear someone speak the text aloud. The audience has gathered, at least in part, to hear a letter from John.

Biblical scholars assume the author intended the book to be read aloud before an audience. For example, Adela Yarbro Collins concludes, "it is better to speak of the first 'hearers' of Revelation, rather than the 'readers.'"[1] This conclusion is in large part based upon the explicit blessing on reader and audience in Rev 1:3: "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it." The author, John, wrote Revelation to be read by another person to an audience and pronounced blessings on these participants in his work. Further, John expects audiences to keep what is written. The communication is meant to transform the audience, shaping their beliefs, attitudes, and actions.

The assumption of a listening audience is also based on the awareness that communication in the ancient world was dominated by speaking.[2]

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[1] A. Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 144. Others who draw a similar conclusion include R. H. Charles, *The Revelation of St. John* (2 vols; ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1920), 1:6; D. Barr, "The Apocalypse as Oral Enactment," *Interpretation* 40.2 (1984): 243–256; R. H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (2nd Ed; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998); D. Aune, *Revelation* (3 vols; WBC; Waco, Texas: Word, 1997–1998), 1:20–21; R. Bauckham, *Climax and Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: T & T Clark, 1993), 1–2; S. Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, structure and exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004), 53.

[2] This thesis is now commonplace, although its implications for Biblical studies are not. For a description of what "primarily oral cultures" means in the Greco-Roman world see the brief discussion in G. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1963), 3–8; and more substantially E. A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986). For specifically biblical texts, see H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995). W. Ong (*Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* [London: Methuen, 1982]) and W. Kelber (*The Oral and the Written Gospel* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983]) have been very influential in emphasizing

Writers of letters, history, and prose recorded their words with ink and parchment so they could be read aloud. As one example, consider a book by Dionysius of Halicarnassus in the 1st c. BCE called περὶ συνθέσεως ὀνομάτων (often translated "On Literary Composition"). By such a title, one may think he will instruct readers on how to compose a pleasing essay, but his discussion of vowels and sounds is quite uninteresting and irrelevant for modern writing. He describes how to compose art with words, but his focus is on how the words sound not how they look on a page. For Dionysius, writing serves the spoken event that an audience experiences. Most modern readers experience Revelation individually while looking silently at characters on a page. For us to understand how the book of Revelation was originally received, we need a conceptual shift. Revelation can and should be conceived primarily as sound in oral communication, not as ink for silent readers.

'Experience' is the proper way to describe an audience's relationship with Revelation. 'Understanding' limits the audience to intellectual engagement with Revelation. Members of the audience not only think but also feel. They are moved by emotions evoked by hearing the visions read aloud. Even 'hearing' is insufficient because an audience looks at the reader and observes gestures, posture, and tone. 'Experience' best captures the full sensory experience and the full humanity of an audience that thinks and feels. "Experiencing Rev 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13" therefore refers to how an audience hears, sees, and responds intellectually and emotionally to those passages while someone reads the whole book of Revelation aloud.

To understand the experience of Rev 7 and 10–11, one could assemble an audience to hear the book of Revelation read aloud. Even with a modern audience it would be an interesting and helpful conversation about how structure affects the experience of a performed text. Yet, this modern audience could never stand in for the original audiences that heard Revelation. In my social location, an audience would hear the work in English, in the twenty-first century, in the United States, within a particular faith community, within almost two thousand years of interpretation tradition, and within contemporary controversies over the use and meaning of the book of Revelation. This social location is important because it informs me and this book, but it does not help us understand how the first audiences heard

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the features of oral cultures. Although there may be a tendency to dichotomize and oversimplify the relationship of writing to orality, their basic insight has withstood scrutiny: Mediterranean cultures in the first century were predominantly oral and this fact impacts the production and experience of texts. For nuance, especially see J. M. Foley, *How to Read an Oral Poem* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2002) and J. Wise, *Dionysius Writes: The Invention of Theatre in Ancient Greece* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1998).

Revelation in Greek, in the late 1st century, in western Asia Minor within the Roman Empire, within a faith emerging from Judaism in a Greco-Roman context, within the interpretations and controversies of that time and place. If we better understand how people in John's time communicated, we may better explain how the book of Revelation is structured and better answer the driving questions of this investigation: How would a first century audience experience Rev 7 and 10–11? How would this experience shape their understanding of the whole?

1. Methodology

Barring a visionary experience, the only way to access the first audiences of Revelation is to focus on the patterns of communication in the first century CE and reflected in the text. We can develop greater sensitivity to the communication dynamics of that time and place by immersing ourselves into (1) discussions of effective communication contemporary with Revelation (e.g. Greco-Roman rhetoricians), (2) other texts that audiences may have heard that reflect communication patterns and expectations and (3) the text of Revelation itself and its assumptions for communication. Since I am trying to understand how the first audiences of Revelation interpreted the arrangement of the visions, I am especially interested in theoretical discussions about effective arrangement and in texts that exhibit similar phenomena as observed in Revelation.

This methodology is based on the work of Margaret M. Mitchell, Bruce Longenecker, and Stephen Pattemore. I examine each of these scholars' methods in detail below and summarize their influence briefly here. Mitchell argues for a historical rhetorical criticism that interprets a text in light of contemporary Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks and actual speeches. Longenecker's analysis of the chain-link transition, especially in Revelation, is consistent with Mitchell's method and provides a model for this investigation. Pattemore uses Relevance Theory to analyze the structure of Revelation. For the present investigation, Relevance Theory provides the conceptual framework that explains why Mitchell and Longenecker's method is appropriate for interpreting ancient texts. These three methods in different ways advocate the same principle: interpreting a text as communication within a particular context.[3] Each makes a specific contribution to this principle: Relevance Theory (as applied by Pattemore) provides the cognitive framework for understanding communication;

[3] For a recent introductory hermeneutics text founded on this principle, see J. K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2007).

Mitchell points to specific resources relevant for 1st century Greco-Roman communication; Longenecker gives a specific example of identifying a structural feature in Revelation using Greco-Roman handbooks and contemporary speeches and literature.

a) Margaret M. Mitchell and Historical Rhetorical Criticism

When rhetorical critics were focusing almost exclusively on rhetorical handbooks or modern philosophy of rhetoric, Mitchell issued a call for immersion in ancient speeches to broaden and deepen analysis.[4] In *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, she lays out mandates for what she calls "historical rhetorical criticism."[5] These mandates can be summarized by two concerns. First, Mitchell is concerned that analysis should be situated in history, consulting actual speeches, handbooks, and texts from the same historical period. This concern rejects modern philosophical approaches to rhetoric, on one hand, and rejects a mechanistic approach of applying rhetorical handbooks without actual speeches on the other. Second, she argues that the focus of analysis should be identifying the genre of the text and demonstrating evidence for that genre in both form and content. Her concern for the coherence of genre with form and content arises out of too facile designations of a text as epideictic, deliberative, or forensic without showing that the topics and arrangement are consistent with other examples of the genre. Mitchell responds to these concerns by explicitly following in the tradition of Hans Dieter Betz (and his seminal study of Galatians) and drawing on a huge range of ancient speeches, handbooks and texts. She analyzes the conventions of invention and arrangement of argumentation in these texts and compares them to Biblical texts.

In her later reflections in the *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, she moderates the importance of identifying and rigorously demonstrating genre to focus on immersion in contemporary literature.[6] She more generally argues that the student of the Greek New Testament who is interested in historical rhetorical criticism should develop a sensibility about how people communicated in those times and places. Rather than emphasizing detection and demonstration of genre, she proposes a more flexible and dynamic understanding of historical rhetorical Criticism.

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[4] M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

[5] Mitchell, *Paul,* 6–17.

[6] M. M. Mitchell, "Rhetorical and New Literary Criticism," in *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies* (eds. J. W. Rogerson and J. M. Lieu; Oxford: Oxford University, 2006), 615–33.

Historical rhetorical criticism as I am defining it here (also Mitchell 1991: 6–17, which sketches five 'mandates' for such study) requires equal contextualization on both sides of the comparison; it is not just a procedure, but an awareness about ancient literary culture that one brings to the reading of any individual piece. It is an attempt to meet ancient *paideia* with modern *paideia*.[7]

Mitchell's primary insight is at the core of the methodology for this investigation. In order to understand ancient texts – and more generally, ancient communication – we should be engaged in education (*paideia*) that produces an awareness of ancient literary culture. We need to be immersed in ancient literature, speeches, and rhetorical handbooks.

Immersion in first-century communication builds on the work of many scholars who have interpreted the book of Revelation in light of Greco-Roman rhetoric.[8] A brief summary identifies some of the key contributors. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza blazed the trail by analyzing the visionary rhetoric that John uses to construct a "symbolic universe" (1985, 1991).[9] This investigation builds on her insights into how the structure of Revelation furthers the Seer's rhetorical goals. Adela Yarbro Collins (1984) investigated how the Seer uses emotion, a crucial topic of this investigation. Her analysis depends largely on modern psychology with some reference to Aristotle's *Poetica* to show how the Seer encourages a perceived crisis and provides catharsis.[10] Using Aristotle's *Rhetorica*, John Kirby (1988) analyzed the ethos, pathos, genre, and rhetorical situation as expressed in Rev 1–3.[11] Robert Royalty (1997, 1998) described how the Seer uses the rhetoric of wealth and such figures as *ekphrasis* (vivid description) and

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[7] Mitchell, "Rhetorical and New Literary Criticism," 623.

[8] For a fine summary of rhetorical criticism of Revelation from 1980 to 2005, see D. A. DeSilva, "What has Athens to Do with Patmos? Rhetorical Criticism of the Revelation of John (1980–2005)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6.2 (2008): 256–289. A. K. W. Siew (*The War Between the Two Beasts and the Two Witnesses: A Chiastic Reading of Revelation 11.1–14.5* [London: T & T Clark, 2005], 279) suggests that Greco-Roman rhetorical categories are not suitable for study of Revelation. He argues that "Hebrew rhetorical devices" (e.g., p. 22) explain the structure. With Longenecker (discussed below), I will argue that some techniques (such as the chain-link transition and digressions) can be observed in both Hebrew and Greek literature, but theoretical discussions are in Greek.

[9] E. Schüssler Fiorenza, "The Followers of the Lamb: Visionary Rhetoric and Social-Political Situation," in *Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. F. Segovia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) republished in *The Book of Revelation: Justice and Judgment* (2nd ed; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 181–204; *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

[10] A. Y. Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

[11] J. T. Kirby, "The rhetorical situations of Revelation 1–3," *NTS* 34.2 (1988): 197–207.

synkrisis (comparison) to change the audience's perception of the world.[12] Barbara Rossing illustrated how Revelation draws on a common "Two Women" *topos* to present a choice between two cities.[13] Royalty and Rossing draw on both rhetorical handbooks and actual speeches consistent with Mitchell's method. David deSilva (1998, 2008) complements handbooks with the socio-rhetorical criticism pioneered by Vernon Robbins to discover John's persuasive strategies, especially with respect to honor discourse and the *topoi* of deliberative rhetoric.[14] Greg Carey (1999) augments ancient rhetorical theory with post-colonial theory to study John's construction of his ethos.[15] Paul Duff (2001) argues that John uses indirect accusation that is consistent with Quintilian's advice on how to malign opponents.[16] Konstantin Nikolakopoulos (2001) argues that John carefully uses rhetorical figures of speech and thought such as hyperbole, oxymoron, paradox, and rhetorical questions.[17] Each in their own way illuminates Revelation using Greco-Roman rhetorical conventions, although none of these scholars quite reach Mitchell's ideal of immersion in contemporary literature and none of them look to rhetorical conventions to explain the structure of Rev 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13. Schüssler Fiorenza and Yarbro Collins offer specific contributions to understand Rev 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13 that will be discussed in later chapters. Bruce Longenecker, dis-

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[12] R. Royalty, "The rhetoric of Revelation," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 36 (1997): 596–617; *The Streets of Heaven: The Ideology of Wealth in the Apocalypse of John* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998).

[13] B. R. Rossing, *The Choice Between Two Cities: Whore, Bride, and Empire in the Apocalypse* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1999).

[14] D. A. deSilva, "Honor Discourse and the Rhetorical Strategy of the Apocalypse of John," *JSNT* 71 (1998): 79–110; "The persuasive strategy of the Apocalypse: a socio-rhetorical investigation of Revelation 14:6–13," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 37.2 (1998): 785–806. Most recently, deSilva has been investigating logos and pathos in Rev 1–3. See "The Strategic Arousal of Emotions in the Apocalypse of John: A Rhetorical-Critical Investigation of the Oracles to the Seven Churches," *NTS* 54 (2008): 90–114; "Out of our Minds? Appeals to Reason (Logos) in the Seven Oracles of Revelation 2–3," *JSNT* 31.2 (2008): 123–155; and the helpful summary of scholarship, "What has Athens to Do with Patmos? Rhetorical Criticism of the Revelation of John (1980–2005)," *Currents in Biblical Research* 6.2 (2008): 256–289.

[15] G. Carey, *Elusive Apocalypse: Reading Authority in the Revelation to John* (Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics 15; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999).

[16] P. B. Duff, *Who Rides the Beast? Prophetic Rivalry and the Rhetoric of Crisis in the Churches of the Apocalypse* (New York: Oxford, 2001).

[17] K. Nikolakopoulos, "Rhetorische Auslegungsaspekte der Theologie in der Johannesoffenbarung," in "*...Was ihr auf dem Weg verhandelt habt": Beiträge zur Exegese und Theologie des neuen Testaments: Festschrift für Ferdinand Hahn zum 75. Geburtstag* (eds. P. Müller, C. Gerber, T. Knöppler and P. Muller; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001), 166–180.

cussed in detail below, provides the best example of an investigation into structure that is consistent with Mitchell's methodology.

b) Bruce Longenecker and Chain-Link Transitions

Although he does not explicitly follow Mitchell's method, Bruce Longenecker's analysis of the chain-link transition is congruent with historical rhetorical criticism as she proposes it.[18] His analysis is the primary model for this investigation. Similar to our quest to understand the structure of Revelation 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13, he sought to explain the odd structure of Revelation 22:6–9 which seems to belong both to the previous vision of the New Jerusalem and at the same time to the concluding visions. To approach this problem, he triangulated (1) rhetorician's recommendations, (2) sources prior or contemporary to the New Testament, and (3) the New Testament texts.[19] Consistent with Mitchell's method, he analyzes a text in light of rhetorical conventions expressed in both handbooks and contemporary texts.

From a few brief passages in Quintilian and Lucian of Samosata, Longenecker identifies a technique he calls a "chain-link transition" that he discovers in the ancient literature, including the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.[20] Lucian advises

> [T]hough all parts must be independently perfected, when the first is complete the second will be brought into essential connection with it, and *attached like one link of a chain to another* (ἁλύσεως τρόπον συνηρμοσμένον); there must be no possibility of separating them; no mere bundle of parallel threads; the first is not simply to be next to the second, but part of it, their extremities intermingling.[21]

If an orator wants to join units A and B together in way that gives it "continuity of motion and connection of style" (as Quintilian says), the orator will take the end of A and overlap it with the beginning of B, so that the

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[18] B. Longenecker, *Rhetoric at the Boundaries: The Art and Theology of the New Testament Chain-Link Transitions* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University, 2005).

[19] Longenecker, 9.

[20] The chain-link transitions he finds include Plutarch's *Quomodo adul. (How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend, Moralia* 51D–55E and 66E); Philo of Alexandria, *De Vita Mosis* 1.334–2.1; Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.320–2.2; 4 Ezra 5:14–22; 6:30–35; 13:56–14:1; Isaiah 48:16b–22; 53:2b–6; John 12:20–50; 1 Cor 8:7–8; Rom 7:25; 10:16–17; 12:15–16; 13:13–14.

[21] Lucian, *Hist. conscr.* 55: ἀπόλυτα γὰρ καὶ ἐντελῆ πάντα ποιήσει, καὶ τὸ πρῶτον ἐξεργασάμενος ἐπάξει τὸ δεύτερον ἐχόμενον αὐτοῦ καὶ ἁλύσεως τρόπον συνηρμοσμένον ὡς μὴ διακεκόφθαι μηδὲ διηγήσεις πολλὰς εἶναι ἀλλήλαις παρακειμένας, ἀλλ᾽ ἀεὶ τῷ πρώτῳ τὸ δεύτερον μὴ γειτνιᾶν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ κοινωνεῖν καὶ ἀνακεκρᾶσθαι κατὰ τὰ ἄκρα. Translation from Longenecker, 12. My emphasis.

final structure is A-b-a-B.[22] This technique for transitioning between two units makes sense when heard, but looks out of place to the modern eye.[23] By better understanding this technique, Longenecker argues, we can better understand how a first century audience heard the text.

For example, Rev 22:6–9 has long stymied interpreters.[24]

22:6a And he said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true,
22:6b for the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place."
22:7a "See, I am coming soon!
22:7b Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."
22:8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me;
22:9 but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your comrades the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

Rev 22:6a is almost a word-for-word repetition of Rev 19:9, and Rev 22:8–9 a repetition of Rev 19:10. This repetition closes the vision of Rev 21:9–22:9, mirroring the function of Rev 19:9–10 for 17:1–19:10.[25] On the other hand, Rev 22:6b–7 repeats wording from Rev 1:1–3 and anticipates 22:10–21. By recalling the opening words, Rev 22:6b–7 initiates the conclusion of the book. Longenecker writes, "22:6–9 seems to have been constructed in a back-and-forth manner, with 22:6–7 largely introducing later material, and 22:8–9 largely concluding earlier material."[26] The structure of these units is

A (21:9–22:5/9) - b (22:6–7a) - a (22:7b–9) - B (22:6/10–21).

He concludes that this is a chain-link construction described by Quintilian and Lucian. Longenecker finds four cases of the chain-link transitions in

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[22] Longenecker, 18–20. Quintilian, *Inst*. IX.4.129: "a certain continuity of motion and connection of style. All its members are to be closely linked together, while the fluidity of its style gives it great variety of movement; we may compare its motion to that of people who link hands to steady their steps, and lend each other mutual support." (Historia non tam finitos numeros quam orbem quendam contextumque desiderat. Namque omnia eius membra connexa sunt et, quoniam lubrica est, hac atque illac fluit, ut homines, qui manibus invicem apprehensis gradum firmant, continent et continentur. Translation from Longenecker, 13.)

[23] Longenecker, 51.

[24] Longenecker, 106, categorizes scholars as follows: Some suggest that 19:10 is an redactional insertion duplicating 22:8–9 (e.g. Charles) while others suggest 22:8–9 duplicates 19:10 (e.g. Kraft, Aune). See discussion about the complexity of these verses in Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 18–21.

[25] Longenecker, 105.

[26] Longenecker, 108.

Revelation (3:21–22; 8:2–5; 15:1–4; 22:6–9), each of which occurs at a major division of the text.[27]

Longenecker's work is significant for the present study of Rev 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13 because it illustrates Mitchell's method and illuminates a structural technique described by rhetoricians and used in a variety of contemporary literature. Longenecker makes the case that these four transitions are "calculated" expressions of the chain-link technique, demonstrating that the Seer deployed a convention of speech described by Greco-Roman rhetoricians and used by various orators and authors.[28] He does not claim that the Seer studied rhetorical handbooks, but that this convention was freely accessible, even expressed in the Hebrew Bible.[29] The working assumption for the present investigation is that conventions found in Greco-Roman handbooks and speeches may explain the structure of Rev 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13 within the series of seals and trumpets. Longenecker only had scant passages from Quintilian and Lucian to interpret the chain-link technique, but there is abundant theoretical reflection and practical use of digressions in speeches and literature. In chapter 4, I provide examples in both Greek and Hebrew sources that demonstrate widespread use and familiarity with digressions.

The distinction between 'articulated' and 'unarticulated' rhetorical techniques is another of Longenecker's contributions to the present investigation.[30] An articulated chain-link explicitly identifies that a transition is being made, while an unarticulated one does not. He gives examples of articulated transitions in Josephus.[31] This distinction explains why this technique has not been detected in the New Testament before now. Longenecker explains, "most of the examples of chain-link construction in the New Testament are precisely of this unarticulated kind."[32] I also apply this distinction to digressions and discover that while Josephus uses some articulated digressions, those in the New Testament are unarticulated.

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[27] Longenecker, 112–116.

[28] Longenecker, 103. Consider Nikolakopoulos' similar conclusion with respect to figures of thought: "Die Untersuchung der Rhetorik hat jedoch gezeigt, dass die Anwendung rhetorischer Gedankenfiguren nicht zufällig, sondern bewusst mit (bedeutendem) inhaltlichem Sinn und Zweck erfolgt." (The investigation of the rhetoric showed that the application of rhetorical figures of thought does not take place coincidentally, but consciously with (important) sense and purpose in respect to content. "Rhetorische Auslegungsaspekte," 179.)

[29] Longenecker, 69–79, identifies Isaiah 48:16b–22, 53:2b–6 and Daniel 7 as chain-link transitions in the Hebrew Bible.

[30] Longenecker, 45.

[31] *Contra Apionem* 1.320 and 2.1–2. Longenecker, 65–66.

[32] Longenecker, 46.

Longenecker goes beyond identifying this structural technique to reflect on its theological implications. Structure impacts meaning; he shows how the chain-link affects the meaning of the text. He argues that the use of chain-link transitions in Revelation simultaneously demarcates and unites the units, hybridizes the epistolary and apocalyptic genres, and democratizes the visions. By use of chain-link construction in Rev 8:2–5, the seven seals "hands off" the narrative to the seven trumpets. John creates an epistolary-apocalyptic hybrid by fusing the epistolary framework and apocalyptic visions with chain-links in Rev 3:21–22 and 22:6–9. This new hybrid democratizes the visions, revealing them to both the worthy and unworthy, a break from other Jewish apocalyptic (e.g. 4 Ezra) directed only to a select group. Longenecker draws this conclusion from the Seer's use of the chain-link technique:

> By means of chain-link interlock, the author not only links apocalyptic and epistolary genres together, but does so precisely in order that the visionary scenarios of supra-human phenomena might be seen as relevant to the ordinary lives of those who would seek to follow the Lamb.[33]

In summary, Longenecker helps us to identify a transition technique described by Greco-Roman rhetoricians and used in contemporary literature. He provides the terminology of 'articulated' and 'unarticulated.' He explores its impact on the meaning of a text. In these ways, his analysis provides a model that I employ for identifying and understanding the structural features observed in Rev 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13.

c) Stephen Pattemore and Relevance Theory

Stephen Pattemore's use of Relevance Theory is a third contributor to the methodology of this investigation.[34] Developed from the linguistic study of pragmatics by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, Relevance Theory is a theory of communication that, in part, provides a framework for explaining how people understand utterances and decide between things that are more or less relevant in a particular context.[35] Since an audience cannot explore every possible implication of an utterance, they must go through some kind of process of limiting and selecting relevant implications. This cognitive

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[33] Longenecker, 119; cf. 7–8.

[34] S. Pattemore, *Souls under the Altar: Relevance Theory and the Discourse Structure of Revelation* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2003); *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, structure and exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004).

[35] D. Sperber and D. Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (2nd ed; Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 193–202. Pattemore (*People of God*, 11) proposes that Relevance Theory provides "a discriminatory hermeneutic criterion by which to evaluate the significance of proposed background information for the understanding of the text."

process is the chief insight of Relevance Theory: that an audience will choose the most meaningful connections to their environment that requires the least amount of effort. In the technical sense, the *relevance* of a particular expression or communication is based on these two factors, contextual effects and processing effort. *Contextual effects* are those meaningful connections with their environment, which include negating, strengthening, extending, or enriching existing assumptions.[36] *Processing effort* refers to the mental energy needed to bring about these contextual effects.[37] The previous paragraph is a good example of this trade-off. I have italicized technical terms in order to minimize the reader's effort to recognize them as technical words and to maximize the strength of the reader's assumptions about these terms.

The concept of *manifestness* is critical to understanding how speaker and audience relate, especially what modern interpreters can conclude about an audience's experience of an ancient text. A fact is *manifest* to an individual if that person can mentally represent it at a given time and accept that representation as true or probably true.[38] Fact is too strong a word, because Sperber and Wilson extend 'fact' to include all perceptions and awareness including assumptions and falsehoods that a person believes to be true.[39] That person's *cognitive environment* is the set of facts that are manifest at a given time. The set of facts that are manifest to both speaker and audience is called the *mutual cognitive environment*. This does not necessarily mean that they at all times and places do share this set, but that in a given time they are capable of sharing a set of facts.[40] This concept assists our analysis of how an audience understands an ancient text because it is extremely difficult (if not impossible) to demonstrate that a specific audience interpreted a text in a specific way. Using Relevance Theory, it is sufficient to present evidence that at that general time and place audiences were capable of understanding it in a specific way. I will show that the technique of digression (discussed under the technical term παρέκβασις) was a part of the *mutual cognitive environment*; therefore audiences *could* experience it in relationship to other experiences of digression.

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[36] Sperber and Wilson, 108–9, define *contextual effects* as the contextualization of the union of old information and new information. For example, "new information may provide further evidence for, and therefore strengthen old assumptions; or it may provide evidence against, and perhaps lead to the abandonment of, old assumptions." Cf. Pattemore, *People of God*, 16.

[37] Sperber and Wilson, 124.

[38] Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 39; Pattemore, *People of God*, 15.

[39] Sperber and Wilson, 39.

[40] Sperber and Wilson, 41.

In Relevance Theory, c*ommunication* is therefore "the attempt to change the cognitive environment of another person, and thus enlarge the scope of what is mutually manifest to both communicator and audience."[41] Based on the mutually manifest cognitive environment, a communicator produces the stimulus that leads the audience to his or her intended meaning.[42] In these terms, John writes the book of Revelation in order to modify his audiences' cognitive environment, i.e. to transform their lives by transforming what they know to be true about God, the world, and themselves.

When someone exhibits behavior that makes it clear they want to communicate, Sperber and Wilson call this *ostensive*.[43] Clearing one's throat, for example, can be a signal that a person wants to communicate. This *ostensive* behavior therefore lays the foundation for successful communication because it suggests that the communication is worth the hearer's attention and effort. In terms of a written text, Relevance Theory assumes that the author intended optimal relevance and left clues that a reader can detect.[44] For the book of Revelation, the author is ostensive when he writes, "Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it…" (1:3). The Seer believes that the audience can understand and keep what is communicated in this book, and pronounces a blessing on those who expend the energy to do so. With respect to this investigation, I am interested in discovering the possible *contextual effects* of the digressions between the sixth and seventh seals and trumpets that makes the increased *processing effort* worthwhile for the audience in a first century Asia Minor *cognitive environment*. In other words, how do the digressions maximize *relevance*?

This framework for understanding communication is congruent with Mitchell's proposal and Longenecker's implementation, although neither are using Relevance Theory. Both Mitchell and Longenecker implicitly assume that the author of a text uses techniques that are intelligible to the audience under optimal circumstances. Longenecker specifically asserts that the Seer intentionally uses the chain-link transition in Rev 22:6–9 saying, "it has been intentionally and extensively calculated and executed."[45]

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[41] Pattemore, *People of God*, 15; cf. Sperber and Wilson, 61.

[42] Pattemore, *People of God*, 17.

[43] Sperber and Wilson, 49; Pattemore, *People of God*, 16.

[44] See the discussion of applying Relevance Theory to texts in Pattemore, *People of God*, 22–46, and his response to critics.

[45] Longenecker, 103. Pattemore (*People of God*, 22–23) addresses the "intentional fallacy" by arguing that it does not apply to Relevance Theory, since relevance theory does not consider intentions before the communication, but examines how communication indicates a mutual cognitive environment. For example, allusions to Daniel, Zechariah, and Exodus within the first eight verses of Revelation indicate that the Seer assumes they are a part of the set of "facts" shared by author and audience for optimal relevance. By

This calculation is based on the assumption that the chain-link transition will lead the audience to the intended meaning, i.e. that the chain-link transition is a part of the *mutual cognitive environment*. Relevance Theory provides the cognitive rationale for the assumption that the Seer used this technique expecting his audience to understand that it smoothly joins and fuses units together. Using a similar line of thought, I argue that digressions were a part of the mutual cognitive environment of the Seer and audiences in Asia Minor in the first century CE.

Greg Carey offers three criticisms of Pattemore's application of Relevance Theory.[46] First, he suggests that Pattemore emphasizes cognition over affect and, second, collaborative over conflicted communication. Last, he wonders if the same results could be reached without Relevance Theory. The first two objections are valid in part because neither Sperber and Wilson nor Pattemore discuss emotion or conflict but subsume these under the category of *cognitive environment*.[47] The emotional state of a hearer is one piece of the hearer's cognitive environment, which may be *manifest* if the hearer can represent it as true. It is *mutually manifest* if both speaker and hearer can represent it. The same is true of conflict.[48] Emotion or conflict may be features of the cognitive environment that the speaker is

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alluding to these texts, he signals them as a part of the cognitive environment in which hearers should search for relevance. The hearer is then left to deduce the particular contextual effect. Hearers who do not have access to these texts, or have to expend too much processing effort to access them, will not reach optimal relevance.

[46] G. Carey, "The People of God in the Apocalypse (Review)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67.4 (Oct 2005): 722–3. For other responses to critics of Relevance Theory (esp. E. Wendland), see Pattemore, *People of God*, 35–36.

[47] E.g. Sperber and Wilson, 153: "A stimulus is a phenomena designed to achieve cognitive effects….Someone who wants to achieve a specific cognitive effect must therefore try to produce a stimulus which, when optimally processed, will achieve just the intended effect. This effect may be achieved at either the attentive or the sub-attentive level. When a child wants her parents to feel sorry for her, the best course might be to cry in a manifestly sincere way: the parents' attention will be pre-empted, and the most relevant assumption will be that the child is distressed." On emotion and conflict as parts of the cognitive environment, see *inter alia* elsewhere in *Relevance.*

[48] Carey may be reacting to the word "collaborative" to describe the communication, but in Relevance Theory this does not mean the absence of conflict or that a hearer cannot reject the speaker's inferences. As far as I can tell, Pattemore and Sperber and Wilson do not use "collaborative," but do modify Grice's "co-operative principle." They understand that conflict between speaker and hearer may mean that stimuli are not optimally processed, and misunderstanding is a result. The point, however, is that ostensive communication requires the audience's attention and will attempt to maximize relevance. For example, see Sperber and Wilson, 155: "Someone who asks you to behave in a certain way, either physically or cognitively, suggests that he has good reason to think it might be in your own interests, as well as his, to comply with his request. This suggestion may be ill founded or made in bad faith, but it cannot be wholly cancelled."

trying to change. (Recall that *communication* is the attempt to change the cognitive environment of another.) In this way, Relevance Theory more robustly incorporates both the fact and the awareness of emotion or conflict in the communication situation, and understands that the speaker may be communicating in order to alter the emotion or conflict. In this study, I address emotion explicitly because of its importance to digressions specifically and to rhetoric in general.

Carey also critiques Pattemore's application of Relevance Theory, suggesting that the same results can be reached by traditional methodologies. As discussed below, the payoff for Pattemore is a theoretical framework for deciding which allusions and sources are most relevant for understanding the text. Carey correctly notes that other scholars have reached similar conclusions about allusions; however, Relevance Theory offers a foundation for these conclusions based on a fully developed, cross-disciplinary communication theory. Conceiving biblical texts as communication in a specific context requires some kind of theory about how human beings communicate. Rather than accepting vague definitions of terms like "communication" and "context," Relevance Theory provides definitions for our analysis of a text grounded in a comprehensive cognitive framework.

More specifically in relationship to this project, the concepts of Relevance Theory help to explain why later interpreters may misinterpret structural techniques like the digression and the chain-link transition. To someone familiar with hearing chain-link transitions (i.e. part of their cognitive environment), the technique will be familiar and produce significant contextual effects. To someone reading the text and unfamiliar with its use, it may be awkward and lead to misunderstanding. The Seer uses this device because he assumes it will have significant effect on his audiences. I will show that digressions were commonly used in the first century and would be a part of many audiences' cognitive environments, but as composition became more mechanical and amplification took over many of the functions of digressions, the technique was no longer a part of audiences' cognitive environments.[49] As a result, I argue, Revelation 7:1–17 and 10:1–11:13 have been labeled with a wide variety of terms in order to explain the arrangement of visions.

Pattemore's application of Relevance Theory also provides a process for analyzing units of text. Similar to Hellholm and E. Müller's application of text linguistics and discourse analysis to Revelation, Pattemore breaks

[49] On the changing role of amplification see M. Poser, *Der abschweifende Erzähler: Rhetorische Tradition und deutscher Roman im achtzehnten Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Verlag Gehlen, 1969). Unarticulated chain-link transitions and unarticulated digressions seem especially prone to misinterpretation.

down the text into its smallest expressions and analyzes how these expressions are constructed.[50] He delimits units by words and phrases (such as μετὰ ταῦτα, καὶ ἰδού, etc.), personal references, change in communication axis, *dramatis personae*, spatial signals, or temporal signals. Then these units are examined to determine which environments are activated. As described above, *cognitive environment* is a broader and more specific term than simply 'context' because it includes the social and existential situation of the hearers (situational context), textually defined environments (intertext),[51] and the progressive processing of the text itself (co-text). On the last point, Relevance Theory emphasizes the need to study a text linearly just as the audience experiences it in a linear fashion.[52] Each utterance adds sequentially to the mutual cognitive environment, so that the audience refers back to previous utterances as potentially the most relevant. After determining what cognitive environments may have been triggered in the search for optimal relevance, the interpreter prioritizes which environments yield the most positive contextual effects (meaningful connections to the audience's environment) for the least amount of processing effort.[53]

The main payoff for using Relevance Theory is a framework for deciding which elements of a cognitive environment are most relevant. For example, Pattemore excludes Ezekiel 9 (an angel makes a mark on people in Jerusalem to protect them from destruction) as a necessary cognitive environment for understanding the sealing in Rev 7 because it would "require significant processing effort, computing differences in general tenor, in circumstances, and in detail, before John's audience could extract positive cognitive effects."[54] In contrast, the description of the two witnesses as "two olive trees and two lampstands" (Rev 11:4) is not optimally relevant unless the audience recognizes the allusion to Zechariah 4 which describes

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[50] D. Hellholm, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 13–64; E. Müller, *A Microstructural Analysis of Revelation 4–11* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University Press, 1996).

[51] Pattemore, *People of God*, 39.

[52] Pattemore, *People of God*, 49. This does not rule out non-linear study of the text, but the initial and most common experience of the text is a sequential hearing. Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 2, makes a key distinction between three ways of experiencing the text: oral performance, attentive rereading and study, and assiduous study. Cf. E. F. Lupieri, *A Commentary on the Apocalypse of John* (trans. M. P. Johnson and A. Kamesar; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 99–100.

[53] Pattemore, *Souls under the Altar*, 28. This is not to say that Relevance Theory assumes "easy listening." Co-text and contextual markers may indicate that a meaning obtained through minimum processing is not adequate, and that hearers must expend additional effort to obtain optimal relevance. See Pattemore, *People of God*, 26, 36 (responding to Wendland's critique of Relevance Theory).

[54] Pattemore, *People of God*, 131.